

VZCZCXRO5729
RR RUEHCD RUEHGD RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD RUEHRS RUEHTM
DE RUEHME #3834/01 1921831
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 111831Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2093
INFO RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1203
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2238
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MEXICO 003834

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [MX](#)

SUBJECT: SRE BRIEFS DIPLOMATIC CORPS ON ELECTION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On July 7, the SRE held its second post-electoral briefing for the diplomatic community. The briefing was presided over by Foreign Secretary Derbez, although Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) Counselor Alejandra Latapi, one of the two IFE representatives in attendance, led the presentation. Latapi used the event to seek to refute the allegations of electoral improprieties that have been raised by PRD candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), including alleged manipulation of IFE's preliminary vote count (PREP), and the exclusion of some 2.5 million votes from the PREP. Latapi defended the transparency of the election process, reiterating that it had been found to be free and fair by numerous domestic and international observers. While the briefing was well-prepared, detailed, and persuasive, it had a very defensive tone, reflecting the pressure that IFE is under to defend a process that has come under strident attack from AMLO's supporters. End summary.

¶2. (U) On July 7, the SRE held a briefing for members of the diplomatic community on the status of the Mexican presidential election, including the allegations of irregularities raised by AMLO. The briefing -- presided over by Foreign Secretary Luis Derbez and conducted principally by IFE Counselor Alejandra Latapi -- attracted approximately 100 members of the diplomatic community, including numerous ambassadors, reflecting the high level of international interest in the process. Latapi's well-organized briefing sought to forcefully refute the most significant allegations of electoral irregularities that AMLO has raised in the days since the July 2 election.

Why Did the Preliminary Vote Count Consistently Show Calderon in the Lead?

¶3. (U) Latapi began the session by seeking to refute AMLO's allegation that the PREP had somehow been manipulated to show Calderon in the lead from the very beginning of the count. Latapi explained that the PREP -- conducted between 20:00 on Election Day, July 2, and 20:00 on July 3 -- automatically recorded precinct results in the chronological order in which they were received by IFE and that there was no possibility for manipulating the count. She added that in fact, the very first precinct results, which IFE began to receive shortly after the first polls closed on July 2 at 18:00 (Mexico City time), actually showed the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the lead. Between approximately 18:30 and 19:45, the lead changed several times among the three major parties. However, by 20:00, when all polls across Mexico had closed and the PREP became operational, Calderon had again taken the lead in the count, never to relinquish it.

14. (U) Latapi explained Calderon's persistent lead by noting that precincts located in northern Mexico and in urban areas outside Mexico City -- Calderon strongholds -- generally delivered their tally sheets to local IFE offices more quickly than precincts located in rural areas or in Mexico City. PRD strongholds did not report in large number until much later in the evening, by which time Calderon had amassed a sufficiently large lead that he never relinquished first place in the PREP.

15. (U) Latapi also noted that not all precincts reported their results in time to be included in the PREP. In particular, results from some remote areas were not reported until after 20:00 on July 3 and therefore were not included in the PREP, although they were included in the official district count compiled on July 5-6.

How Did 2.5 Million Votes Go Missing?

16. (U) Latapi sought to refute the PRD's allegation that IFE had "lost" over 2.5 million votes, insisting that the manner in which IFE had handled these votes was consistent with the procedure agreed to by IFE and the political parties back in February 2006, and was completely transparent. She explained that in February, the political parties and IFE had come to an agreement that vote tallies presenting certain specified types of inconsistencies would not be included in the PREP, so as not to slow down the preliminary count. Such tally sheets would be set aside in a "file of inconsistencies," for closer review and eventual inclusion in the official district-wide count. She conceded that although IFE probably could have done a better job of explaining this arrangement to the press, these votes were at all times trackable on the PREP website

MEXICO 00003834 002 OF 003

and that the political parties were always well aware of how they were being handled.

17. (U) Latapi explained that most of the vote tally sheets in the "file of inconsistencies" reflected only minor irregularities that had no effect on the vote count: of the 11,184 precinct tally sheets included in the "file of inconsistencies," over 8,000 of them involved tally sheets in which the election workers neglected to record a "0" where a particular party did not receive any votes (or where there were no null votes or votes for unregistered candidates). In other words, where the election workers left a blank for a party or category receiving no votes, rather than recording a "0," the tally sheet was added to the file of inconsistencies, for tabulation later.

Why Did AMLO Lead the District Retabulation for the First 20 Hours?

18. (U) Latapi emphasized that during the official district vote count conducted on July 5-6, IFE recorded returns in the order in which they were reported by each of the 300 electoral districts. Latapi strongly implied, as post has previously reported (reftel), that in addition to any legitimate requests made by PRD representatives during the district retabulation process for recounting the votes from specific ballot boxes that presented inconsistencies, the PRD representatives also appeared to intentionally engage in dilatory tactics in precincts favorable to the PAN. As a result, PRD strongholds reported their retabulated results earlier than PAN strongholds, creating the impression during much of the retabulation that AMLO was ahead. She noted that notwithstanding criticism of the PREP, this year the PREP proved even more accurate than in the 2000 election: while the difference between Calderon's margin in the PREP (1.04%) and in the final tabulation (0.58%) was 0.46%, the difference between Fox's lead in 2000 in the PREP and in the final retabulation was 0.48%.

The Election Process Was Transparent

¶9. (U) Reiterating the transparency of the electoral process, Latapi reminded the audience that Mexico's political parties had observed and "accompanied" IFE in every step of the process, from the preparation of the voter registry to the counting of the ballots on Election Day to the retabulation of votes by IFE's district councils. She added that of the over 130,000 precincts nationwide, 87% had the representative of at least one political party present and over 78% had the representatives of at least two parties present. Approximately 15% of precincts also had non-party observers present.

The Election Was Widely Found to Be Free and Fair

¶10. (U) Latapi emphasized that the election has been widely recognized as free and fair by both domestic and international actors and observers. She said that of Mexico's eight political parties, five have recognized the process as free and fair, with only the three members of the PRD-led "Alliance for the Benefit of Everyone" refusing to do so. Likewise, she noted that civil society organizations including business groups, certain labor unions, and the Catholic church have recognized that the election was fair. She said that of the 26 election observer groups working through the UN Development Program, 24 have recognized the process as free and fair. Finally, she said that such foreign and international organizations as the EU, the Council of Europe, the UN, the OAS, the National Democratic Institute, the Interamerican Union of Electoral Organizations, and groups of European and Latin American parliamentarians, have all recognized the transparency of the election.

¶11. (U) During a question and answer session at the end of IFE's presentation, the Canadian Ambassador noted that the media had reported a lot of inconsistent information about the electoral process, and he recommended that in order to prevent such misinformation from influencing public opinion, that IFE be more proactive in communicating accurate information. Foreign Secretary Derbez closed the session by noting that he would look into the possibility of organizing a briefing with staff of the electoral tribunal, to clarify this process for the diplomatic community.

MEXICO 00003834 003 OF 003

Comment: IFE on the Defensive

¶12. (SBU) Although the briefing was well-organized, detailed, and persuasive, a defensive tone prevailed throughout. The briefing left the impression that IFE realized its reputation was at risk from persistent PRD criticisms and that the time had come for it to begin mounting a strident defense.

Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity>

GARZA